

# Retrospect

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## Cereal Cultivation in the Horton Plains: prehistoric or later historic?

*Anura Manatunga*

The discovery of pollen grains of cultivated cereals from the Horton Plains in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka, and dating them to the prehistoric period as early as 17,500 calculated years before present (BP) has opened a new vista in Sri Lankan archaeology. These discoveries and consequent interpretations have been put forward in a series of research papers by Ratnasiri Premathilake (1997;2003;2003a;2003b), the principal investigator and his associates (Premathilake, Epitawatta and Nilsson 1999; Premathilake and Risberg 2003) synthesizing the results of their studies on the palaeoecological aspect of the Late Quaternary of the Island.

According to Premathilake, pollen of Oats (*Avena sp.*) has been found in an assemblage dated 17,500 years BP<sup>1</sup> while pollen evidence of cultivated Barley (*Hordium sp.*) appeared around 16,000 years before in the same Local Pollen Assemblage Zone (LPAZ-2). He interpreted this as a result of an incipient management of cereals by prehistoric man in the form of shifting cultivation along with limited livestock farming (Premathilake 2003:10). He believes that this form of agriculture has been developed into a certain degree of systematic cultivation by 13,000 years BP as a result of climatic amelioration for cultivation. It had turned to a decline around 8000 BP and has come to an end by 3000 BP due to an intensified aridity of the climate. Further, he has identified pollen of cultivated Wheat (*Triticum sp.*) in LPAZ-6 which he dated to the period of 2000-150 BP,